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1 JOHN 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS[4]	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Spirit of God and the Spirit of Antichrist	The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error	Discernment of Truth and Error	The True Spirit and the False Spirit	The Third Condition: To Be on Guard Against Antichrists and Against the World
	3:24-4:6			
4:1-6		4:1-6	4:1-3	4:1-6
			4:4-6	The Source of Love and Faith
				(4:7-5:13)
God is Love	Knowing God Through Love	The Blessedness of Love	God is Love	The Source of Love
4:7-12	4:7-11	4:7-12	4:7-10	4:7-5:4
	Seeing God Through Love		4:11-12	
	4:12-16			
4:13-16a		4:13-16a	4:13-16a	
4:16b-21	The Consummation of Love	4:16b-21	4:16b-18	
	4:17-19			
	Obedience by Faith		4:19-21	
	4:20-5:5			

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO 4:1-21

A. John 4 is a very specialized literary unit on how Christians assess and verify those who claim to speak for God. This passage is related to
   1. these false prophets called antichrists (cf. 1 John 2:18-25)
   2. those who try to deceive (cf. 1 John 2:26; 3:7)
   3. possibly those who claim knowledge of special spiritual truths (cf. 1 John 3:24)

      To fully understand the predicament of the early Christians one must recognize that many claimed to speak for God (cf. 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; 1 John 4:1-6). There was no complete and available New Testament. Miracles are not automatically signs of God's activity (cf. Matt. 7:21-23; 24:24). Spiritual discernment involved both doctrinal and social tests (cf. James 3:1-12).

B. 1 John is extremely hard to outline because of the recurring pattern of themes. This is surely true in 1 John 4. It seems that this chapter re-emphasizes truths which were taught in earlier chapters, especially the believers' need to love one another (cf. 1 John 4:7-21; 2:7-12 and 3:11-24).

C. John is writing both to combat the false teachers and to encourage the true believers. He does this by using several tests:
   1. the doctrinal test (belief in Jesus, cf. 1 John 2:18-25; 4:1-3,14-16; 5:1,5,10)
   2. lifestyle test (obedience, cf. 1 John 2:3-7; 3:1-10, 22-24)
   3. the social test (love, cf. 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-12,16-21; 5:1-2)

      Different parts of Scripture relate to different false teachers. 1 John addresses the heresy of Gnostic false teachers. See Introduction to 1 John, the Heresy. Other parts of the NT address other untruths. Each context must be studied separately to ascertain what error is being addressed. There was error from several sources.
   4. Jewish legalists (i.e., the Judaizers, cf. Galatians; Col. 1:16)
   5. Greek philosophers (i.e., 1 Corinthians 1; 1 John)
   6. Greek antinomians (i.e., 1 John)
   7. those who claimed special spiritual revelation or experiences (i.e., Col. 1:18; 1 John)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED TEXT: 4:1-6

[1]Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2]By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; [3]and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. [4]You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. [5]They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. [6]We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

4:1 "do not believe" This is a PRESENT IMPERATIVE with a NEGATIVE PARTICLE which usually means to stop an act already in process. The tendency of Christians is to accept strong personalities, logical arguments, or miraculous events as from God. Apparently the false teachers were claiming (1) to speak for God or (2) to have had a special revelation from God.

In 2 John 7-11 it may relate to traveling teachers who wanted to speak in the house churches.

SPECIAL TOPIC: SHOULD CHRISTIANS JUDGE ONE ANOTHER?

▣ **"every spirit"** "Spirit" is used in the sense of a human person. See note at 1 John 4:6. This refers to a supposed message from God. Heresy comes from within the church (cf. 1 John 2:19) or traveling teachers (cf. 2 John 7-11). The false teachers were claiming to speak for God. John asserts that there are two spiritual sources, God or Satan, behind human speech and action.

SPECIAL TOPIC: SPIRIT IN THE NT

▣ **"but test the spirits"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. This is both a spiritual gift (cf. 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:29) and a necessity for every believer, as are prayer, evangelism, and giving. This Greek word *dokimazō* has the connotation of "to test with a view toward approval." Believers must think the best of others unless the worst is proven (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 Thess. 5:20-21).

How does one test the spirits (i.e., speakers, teachers)? See Contextual Insights, C.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK TERMS FOR TESTING AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS

▣ **"because many false prophets have gone out into the world"** This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE (cf. Jer. 14:14; 23:21; 29:8; Matt. 7:15; 24:11,24; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 2:18-19,24; 3:7; 2 John 7). The implication is that they have left the church (house churches, cf. 1 John 2:18-19), yet continued to claim that they speak for God. They may have become traveling teachers wanting to speak in the house churches (cf. 2 John vv. 7-11).

4:2 "By this you know the Spirit of God" This grammatical form is either a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE (a statement) or PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE (a command). This same ambiguity of form is in "abide," 1 John 2:27 and "know," 2:29. The Holy Spirit always magnifies Jesus (cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). This same test can be seen in Paul's writings in 1 Cor. 12:3.

▣ **"every spirit that confesses"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE which points to a continuing profession, not a doctrinal test of a past affirmation of faith. The Greek term "confess" is a compound from "the same" and "to speak," meaning "to say the same thing." This is a recurrent theme in 1 John (cf. 1 John 1:9; 2:23; 4:2-3; 4:15; John 9:22; 2 John 7). This term implies specific, public, vocal acknowledgment of one's affirmation of and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CONFESSION/PROFESSION

▣ **"that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God"** This is a PERFECT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE. This is the essential doctrinal test for the false teachers (i.e., Gnostics) whom John was combating in this book. Its basic assertion is that Jesus is fully human (i.e., flesh, which the Gnostics denied) as well as fully God (cf. 1 John 1:1-4; 2 John 7; John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16). The PERFECT TENSE affirms that Jesus' humanity was not temporary, but permanent. This was not a minor issue. Jesus is truly one with humanity and one with God.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GNOSTICISM

4:3 "every spirit that does not confess Jesus" It is theologically interesting that the old Latin version of the NT and the Patristic writers, Clement, Origen of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Tertullian have *leui* (looses), which implies "separating Jesus," apparently into a human spirit and a separate

divine spirit which so characterized second century Gnostic writings. But this is a textual addition which reflects the early church's life and death struggle with heresy (see Bart Erhart, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 125-135).

▣ **"the *spirit* of the antichrist"** Here the term (cf. 1 John 2:18-25) is used as a denier of Christ, not an attempt to usurp His position.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE ANTICHRIST

▣ **"you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world"** This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE which implies that John had earlier discussed this subject with them and that its relevance remained. In Greek the PRONOUN "it" matches the NEUTER "spirit." Like 1 John 2:18, this phrase reflects that the spirit of the antichrists has both already come and will come. These Gnostic false teachers form a chain of false information, false lifestyles, and false professions through the ages, from the evil one of Genesis 3 to the manifestation of the incarnation of evil and the end-time Antichrist (i.e., 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13).

4:4-6 "You. . .They. . .We" All of these PRONOUNS are emphasized. There are three groups being addressed.

1. true believers (John and his readers) – You
2. false believers (Gnostic teachers and their followers) – They
3. John's missionary team or theological group – We

This same type of triad is seen in Hebrews 5:11-6:12 and chapter 10. See notes online at www.freebiblecommentary.org.

4:4 "have overcome them" This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. This seems to be a reference to both the doctrinal controversy and the victorious Christian life. What a wonderful word of encouragement for them and us!

John is concerned with the Christian's victory over sin and the devil. He uses this term (*nikaō*) 6 times in 1 John (cf. 1 John 2:13,14; 4:4; 5:4,5), 11 times in the Revelation, and once in John 16:33). This term for "victory" was used only once in Luke (cf. Luke 11:22) and twice in Paul's writings (cf. Rom. 3:4; 12:21).

▣ **"because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world"** This is an emphasis on indwelling Deity. Here it seems to be a reference to the indwelling Father (cf. John 14:23; 2 Cor, 6:16). The NT also emphasizes

1. the indwelling Son (cf. Matt. 28:20; Col. 1:27)
2. the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 John 4:13)

The Spirit and the Son are closely identified (cf. Rom 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11)

The phrase "he who is in the world" refers to Satan (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19) and his followers. The term "world" in 1 John always has negative connotations (i.e., human society organized and functioning apart from God).

SPECIAL TOPIC: JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

SPECIAL TOPIC: *KOSMOS* (world)

4:5 "They are from the world" This is an ABLATIVE of source. The term "world" is used here in the sense of fallen human society trying to meet all of its needs apart from God (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). It refers to fallen humanity's collective independent spirit! An example of this is Cain (cf. 1 John 3:12). Other examples would be (1) Elijah and the Prophets of *Ba'al* (1 Kings 18) and (2) Jeremiah vs. Hananiah (Jeremiah 28).

▣ **the world listens to them"** Another evidence of Christian teachers versus false teachers is who listens to them (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1).

4:6 "who knows God listens to us" This is a PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE. The true believers continue to listen and respond to Apostolic truth! Believers can recognize true preachers/teachers by

1. the content of their message
2. their lifestyle
3. who hears and responds to them

▣ **"By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error"** This may refer to the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6; 5:7) and the evil spirit, Satan. Believers must be able to discern the source of the message. Often they are both given in God's name, supposedly by God's speakers. One lifts up Jesus and Christlikeness and one lifts up human speculation and personal freedom.

Robert Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (pp. 61-63), has an interesting discussion of the uses of the term "spirit" in the NT.

1. evil spirits
2. the human spirit
3. the Holy Spirit
4. things that the Spirit produces in and through human spirits
    a. "not a spirit of slavery vs. a spirit of adoption" – Rom. 8:15
    b. "a spirit of gentleness" – 1 Cor. 4:21
    c. "a spirit of faith" – 2 Cor. 4:13
    d. "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" – Eph. 1:17
    e. "not a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and discipline" – 2 Tim. 1:7
    f. "spirit of error vs. spirit of truth" – 1 John 4:6 (pp. 61-63)

SPECIAL TOPIC: SPIRIT IN THE NT

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:7-14

7Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. 11Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world.

4:7 "let us love one another" This is a PRESENT ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE. Lifestyle, daily love is the one common characteristic of all believers (cf. 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22). This is a recurrent theme in John's writings and the essence of the ethical test (cf. John 13:34; 15:12,17; 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11,23; 2 John 5, see Contextual Insights, C). The SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD states a contingency.

▣ **"for love is from God"** God, not human philanthropy, pity, or emotion, is the source of love (cf. 1 John 4:16). It is not primarily emotional but purposeful action (i.e., the Father sending the Son to die on our behalf, cf. 1 John 4:10; John 3:16).

▣ **"everyone who loves is born of God and knows God"** The VERBS are PERFECT PASSIVE and PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVES. John's favorite terms for becoming a believer are analogous to human birth (cf. 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18; John 3:3,7). See note on "children of God" at 1 John 3:1 and SPECIAL TOPIC: BORN AGAIN.

The term "know" reflects the Hebrew sense of ongoing, intimate fellowship (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5). It is the recurrent theme of 1 John, used over seventy-seven times.

SPECIAL TOPIC: KNOW

4:8 "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" Lifestyle love is "the" true test of knowing God.

This is one of John's profoundly simple statements; "God is love" matches "God is light" (cf. 1 John 1:5) and "God is spirit" (cf. John 4:24). One of the best ways to contrast God's love and God's wrath is to compare Deut. 5:9 with 5:10 and 7:9.

4:9 "By this the love of God was manifested in us" The VERB is an AORIST PASSIVE INDICATIVE (cf. John 3:16; 2 Cor. 9:15; Rom. 8:32). God has clearly shown that He loves us by sending His only Son to die in our place (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10). Love is an action, not just a feeling. Believers must emulate it in their daily lives (cf. 1 John 3:16). To know God is to love as He loves.

The PREPOSITION "in" can mean "among" (i.e., in our midst). This would refer to the apostolic witness of Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. v. 14; 1 John 1:1-3).

▣ **"God has sent His only begotten Son into the world"** This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE; the incarnation and its results remain! All of God's benefits come through Christ.

The term "only begotten" is *monogenēs* which implies "unique," "one of a kind," not begotten as in sexual generation. The virgin birth was not a sexual experience for God or Mary. John uses this term several times referring to Jesus (cf. John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9). See further note at John 3:16. Jesus is God's Son in a unique (ontological) sense. Believers are God's children only in a derived sense.

▣ **"so that we might live through Him"** This is an AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE which implies a contingency, a faith response is necessary. The purpose of the incarnation was eternal life and abundant life (cf. John 10:10).

4:10 "In this is love" God's love is clearly demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus (cf. Rom. 5:6,8). To know Jesus is to know God. To know God is to love!

▣ **"not that we loved God"** The NT is unique among the world religions. Typically religion is mankind seeking God, but Christianity is God seeking fallen mankind! The wonderful truth is not our love for God, but His love for us. He has sought us through our sin and self, our rebellion and pride. The glorious truth of Christianity is that God loves fallen mankind and has initiated and maintained a life-changing contact.

There is a variant related to the form of the VERB.

1. have and continue to love, PERFECT – MS B
2. loved, AORIST – MS א

The UBS^4 gives the PERFECT TENSE a "B" rating (almost certain).

▣ **"sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins"** See note at 1 John 2:2.

SPECIAL TOPIC: SON OF GOD

SPECIAL TOPIC: PROPITIATION

4:11 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. God does love us (cf. Rom. 8:31)!

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS, VII

▣ **"God so loved us"** "So" should be understood as "in such a manner," as in John 3:16.

▣ **"we also ought to love one another"** Because He has loved us we must love one another (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:16; 4:7). This statement of necessity reflects the disruptive actions and attitudes of the false teachers.

4:12 "No one has seen God at any time" This is a PERFECT MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE. This word implies "to gaze intensely at someone or something" (cf. Exod. 33:20-23; John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 Tim. 6:16). It is possible that the Gnostic teachers, somewhat influenced by eastern mystery religions, claimed some type of vision from God or of God. Jesus came to fully reveal the Father. By gazing at Him we know God!

SPECIAL TOPIC: CAN HUMANS SEE GOD AND LIVE?

▣ **"if"** This is a THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which means potential action.

▣ **"God abides in us"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: "ABIDING" IN JOHN'S WRITINGS.

▣ **"His love is perfected in us"** This is a PERIPHRASTIC PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE. Loving Christians are an evidence of the abiding, perfected love of God (cf. 1 John 2:5; 4:17).

4:13 "He has given us of His Spirit" This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. The indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. 1 John 3:24; Rom. 8:9) and His transforming influence are evidence of our true salvation (cf. Rom. 8:16). It seems that 1 John 4:13 is the subjective witness of the Spirit, while 1 John 4:14 is the objective witness of Apostolic testimony. The three persons of the Trinity appear clearly in 1 John 4:13-14.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TRINITY

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE PERSONHOOD OF THE SPIRIT

4:14 "We have seen and testify" The VERBS are PERFECT MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE joined with PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. It speaks of John's eyewitness testimony concerning the person of Christ, just like 1 John 1:1-3.

The term "seen" is the same Greek word as in 1 John 4:12 which means "to gaze intently at."

SPECIAL TOPIC: WITNESSES TO JESUS

▣ **"that the Father has sent the Son"** This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. The fact that God the Father sent God the Son into the world (cf. John3:16) refutes the Gnostic false teaching about the supposed dualism between spirit (good) and matter (evil). Jesus was truly divine and He was sent into an evil world of sin to redeem it and us (cf. Romans 8:18-25) from the curse of Genesis 3 (cf. Gal. 3:13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: SON OF GOD

▣ **"*to be* the Savior of the world"** The fact that the Father chose to use Jesus as the means of salvation refutes the Gnostic false teaching that salvation is obtained through special, secret knowledge related to the angelic levels. They called these angelic levels *eons* or realms of angelic authority between the high God and the lesser god who formed the world out of preexisting matter.

The phrase "Savior of the world" was (1) a title for the gods (i.e., Zeus) and (2) a common title for the Roman Caesar. For the Christian only Jesus could bear this title (cf. John 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10). This is exactly what caused the persecution by local Caesar-cults in Asia Minor.

Notice it is all inclusive. He is the savior of all (not some, cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9) if they will only respond (cf. John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 5:18; 10:9-13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: OUR SAVIOR

SPECIAL TOPIC: ELECTION/PREDESTINATION vs. HUMAN FREE WILL

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:15-21

15Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 18There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 19We love, because He first loved us. 20If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

4:15 "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God" This is an AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE. For "confesses" see note at 1 John 4:2. One of John's three tests of a true Christian is theological truth concerning the person and work of Jesus (cf. 1 John 2:22-23; 4:1-3; 5:1,5). This is also matched in 1 John and James with lifestyle love and obedience. Christianity is a person, a body of truth, and a lifestyle. See Contextual Insights, C.

The inclusive term "whoever" is the great invitation of God for anyone and everyone to come to Him. All humans are made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:3; 9:6). God promised redemption to the human race in Gen. 3:15. His call to Abraham was a call to reach the world (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5). Jesus' death dealt with the sin problem (cf. John 3:16). Everyone can be saved if they will respond to the covenant obligations of repentance, faith, obedience, service, and perseverance. God's word to all is "Come" (cf. Isaiah 55).

SPECIAL TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "RECEIVE," "BELIEVE," "CONFESS/PROFESS," "CALL UPON"?

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

▣ **"God abides in him and he in God"** This reflects the covenantal structure of God's relationship with humankind. God always takes the initiative, sets the agenda and provides the basis for the covenant, but humans have the responsibility to initially respond and to continue to respond.

Abiding is a covenant requirement, but also a wonderful promise (cf. John 15). Imagine the Creator of the universe, the Holy One of Israel, abiding with (indwelling) fallen humans (cf. John 14:23)!

SPECIAL TOPIC: "ABIDING" IN JOHN'S WRITINGS

4:16 "We have come to know and have believed" These VERBS are both PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVES. Believers' confident faith assurance of God's love in Christ, not existential circumstances, is the basis of their joy and assurance.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ASSURANCE

SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIEVE, OR TRUST

▣ **"which God has for us"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE expressing God's continuing love.

▣ **"God is love"** This is a repeated foundational truth (cf. 1 John 4:8).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL'S (OT)

4:17 "By this, love is perfected" This is from the Greek word *telos* (cf. 1 John 4:12). It implies fullness, maturity, and completion, not sinlessness.

▣ **"with us"** This PREPOSITION (*meta*) can be understood as "in us" (TEV, NJB), "among us" (NKJV, NRSV, NIV, REB), or "with us" (NASB).

▣ **"so that we may have confidence"** Originally this term meant freedom of speech. John uses this extensively (cf. 1 John 2:28; 3:21; 5:14). It speaks of our boldness in approaching a holy God (cf. Heb. 3:6; 10:35).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOLDNESS (*parrhēsia*)

▣ **"in the day of judgment, because as He is, so also are we in this world"** Christians are to love as Jesus loved (cf. 1 John 3:16; 4:11). They may be rejected and persecuted as He was, but also they are loved and sustained by the Father and the Spirit as He was! One day all humans will give an account to God for the gift of life (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15). Judgment Day holds no fear for those in Christ.

SPECIAL TOPIC: JUDGMENT IN THE NT

4:18 "There is no fear in love" When we come to know God as Father, we no longer fear Him as judge. Most, if not all, conversions to Christianity involve fear--fear of judgment, of condemnation, of hell. However, a wonderful thing happens in the life of redeemed humans: what starts with fear ends in no fear!

▣ **"fear involves punishment"** This is a rare NOUN used only here and Matt. 25:46 (the VERB form is in 2 Pet. 2:9), which is also an eschatological setting. The PRESENT TENSE VERB implies that fear of God's wrath is both temporal (in time) and eschatological (at the end of time). Humans are made in God's image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) which involves aspects of personality, knowledge, choice, and consequences. This is a moral universe. Humans don't break God's laws; they break themselves on God's laws!

4:19 "We love" This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. The NKJV adds a DIRECT OBJECT after "we love." The manuscript options for a DIRECT OBJECT are:

1. in one uncial Greek manuscript (א) "God" (*ton theon*) is supplied
2. in Ψ "Him" (*auton*) is supplied (KJV)
3. in the Vulgate "one another" is supplied

These DIRECT OBJECTS may be later additions. The UBS^4 gives the VERB only an "A" rating (certain).

▣ **"because He first loved us"** The is the repeated emphasis of 1 John 4:10. God always takes the initiative (cf. John 6:44,65) but fallen mankind must respond (cf. John 1:12; 3:16). Believers trust in His trustworthiness and have faith in His faithfulness. The loving, acting, faithful character of the Triune God is the hope and assurance of redeemed mankind.

4:20 "If someone says" This is a THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which meant potential action. This is another example of John quoting the statements of the false teachers in order to make a point (cf. 1 John 1:6,8,10; 2:4,6). This literary technique is called diatribe (cf. Malachi, Romans, and James).

▣ **"'I love God' and hates his brother"** Our lifestyle love clearly reveals whether we are Christians (cf. Mark 12:28-34). Conflict is possible, but settled hatred is not (PRESENT TENSE).

▣ **"he is a liar"** John calls several "supposed" believers liars (cf. 1 John 2:4,22; 4:20). John also states that those who preach false truths make God a liar (cf. 1 John 1:6,10; 5:10). There surely are self-deceived religionists!

4:21 This verse summarizes the chapter! Love is the non-counterfeitable evidence of a true believer. Hate is the evidence of a child of the evil one. The false teachers were dividing the flock and causing conflict.

▣ **"brother"** It must be admitted that the term "brother" is ambiguous. It could mean "fellow Christian" or "fellow human." However, John's recurrent use of "brother" for believers implies the first meaning (cf. 1 Tim. 4:10).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. List the three major tests of genuine Christianity.
2. How does one know who really speaks for God?
3. List the two sources of truth (subjective and objective).
4. What is significant about the title "Savior of the world"?
5. List the actions that reveal liars (i.e., false believers).

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